

WEST VALLEY HILLSIDES PRESERVATION STRATEGIES

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WEST VALLEY HILLSIDES JOINT PLANNING REVIEW

*A Cooperative Project of
the Cities of Cupertino, Saratoga, and Monte Sereno, the Town of Los Gatos, and
the County of Santa Clara*

Public Review Draft • September 1996

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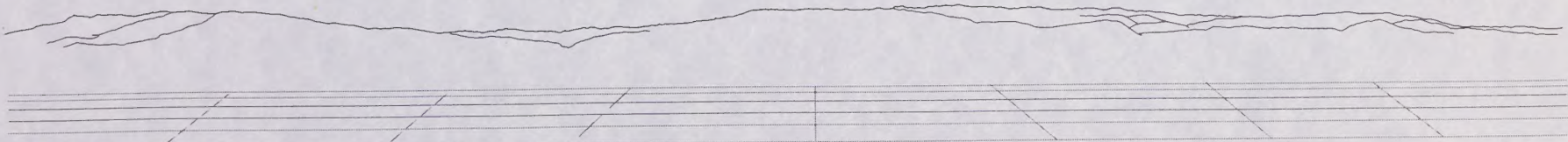
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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of This Report

The scenic backdrop of the Santa Cruz mountains in western Santa Clara County contributes significantly to the quality of life of the region by affording visual and psychological relief from the fast paced urban environment in the valley.

As population grows and development pressures on the hillsides continue, it is important to conserve this natural resource and prevent future development from reducing its natural beauty.

This report presents some key strategies, that can be used to preserve this resource, through inter-jurisdictional cooperation and coordination. The strategies proposed are based on and serve to reinforce existing city, town, and County general plan policies.

History of the Project

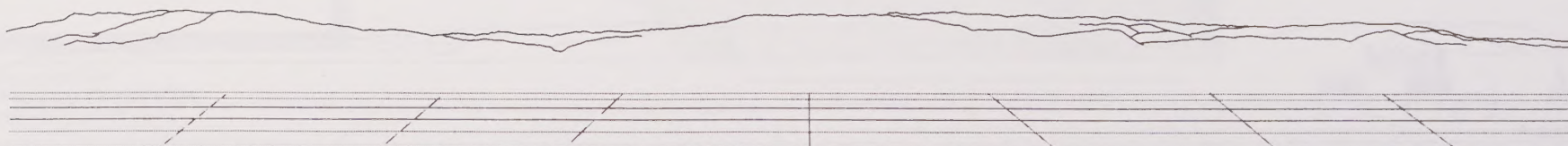
The West Valley Hillsides Joint Planning Review is a collaborative planning project involving the Cities of Cupertino, Monte Sereno and Saratoga, the Town of Los Gatos, and Santa Clara County. It was established to protect the scenic appearance of the West Valley hillsides (the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains) most visible from the valley floor. (see Study Area Map)

This project originated from a proposal for a "Western Santa Clara County Foothills Sub-regional Planning Project" that was submitted to the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) for staff and financial support in November 1994. Although ABAG did not award the grant to this project, the participating jurisdictions determined that since their joint planning goals remained the same, efforts should proceed regardless of the ABAG decision.

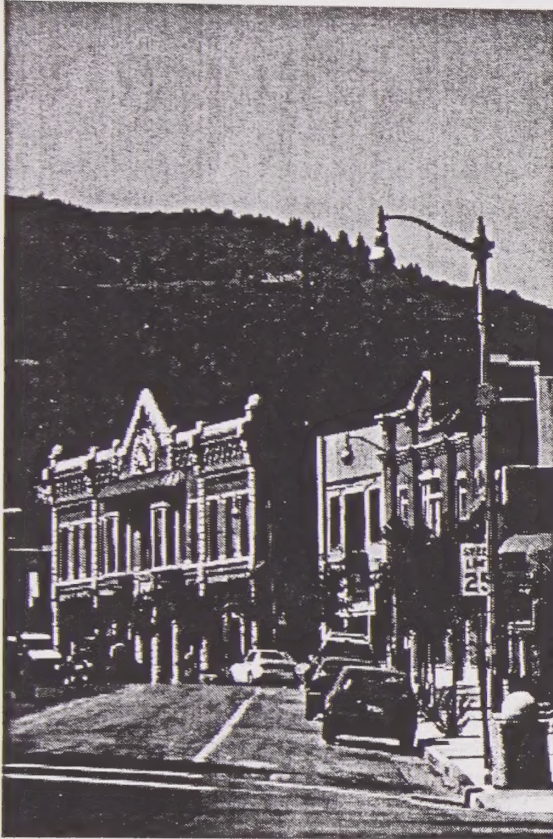
Goals of Project

The major goal of the project is to protect the predominantly natural visual character of the West Valley Hillsides by:

- Confining urban uses to flatland areas most appropriate for urban development.
- Allowing in the hillsides only development appropriate to rural, hillside areas
- Minimizing the visual impacts of non-urban hillside development
- Fostering closer interjurisdictional cooperation and coordination concerning land use and development issues



OVERVIEW OF HILLSIDE PRESERVATION STRATEGIES



This report proposes four basic strategies for preservation of the natural visual character of hillsides.

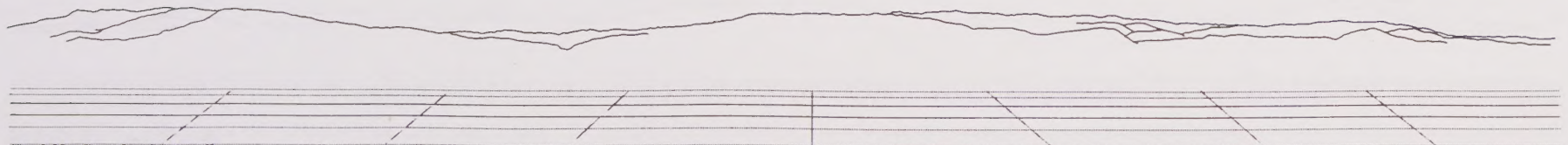
- Strategy #1 Develop joint hillside land use objectives
- Strategy #2 Limit expansion of urban development into hillside areas
- Strategy #3 Minimize the visual impacts of hillside development
- Strategy #4 Provide mechanisms for resolution of future hillside land use issues

Two additional strategies were considered earlier in this study.

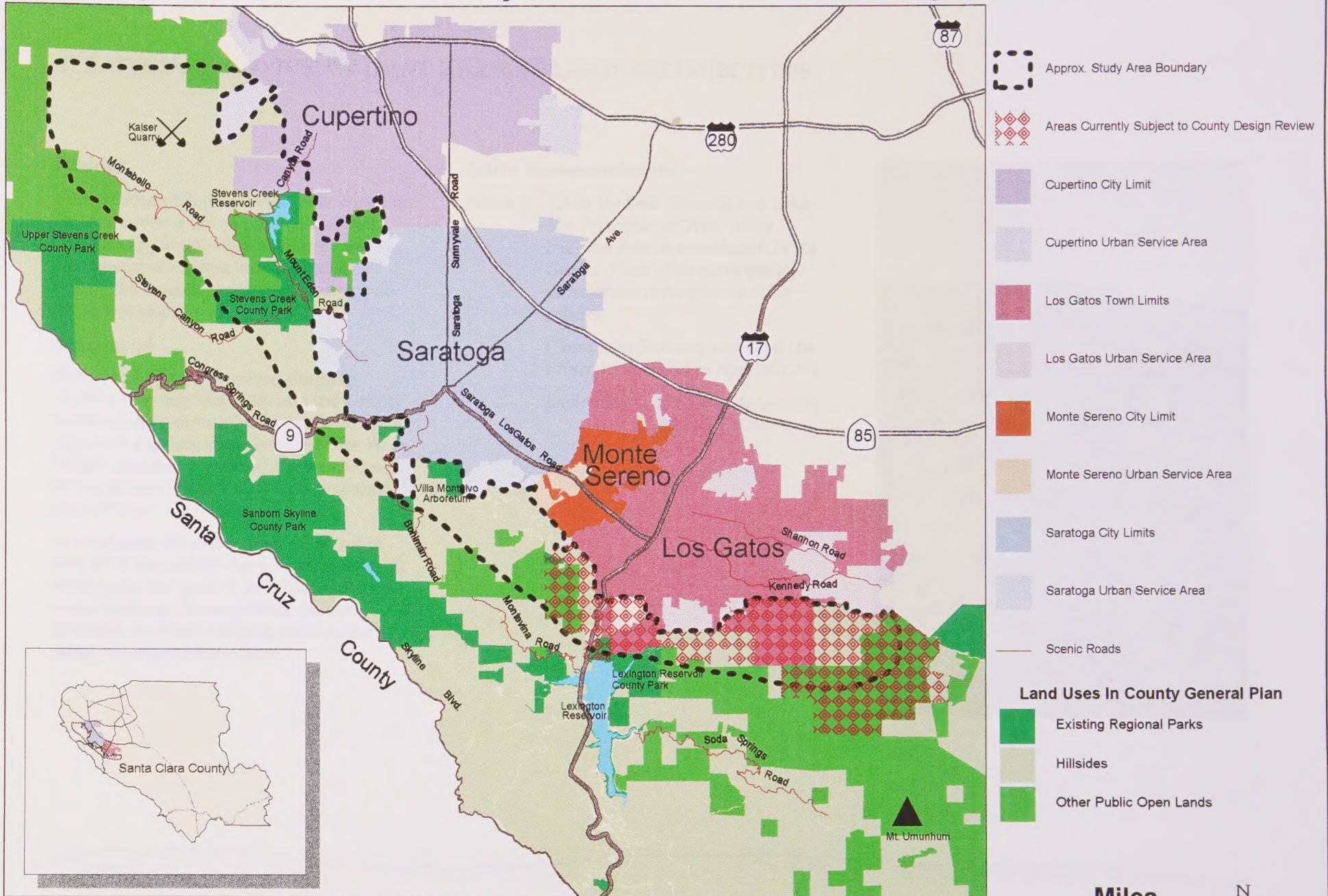
One called for making recommendations to open space agencies regarding acquisition of key parcels which will provide permanent open space protection in the West Valley hillsides. These recommendations will be made at a later date, possibly in conjunction with the review of the Master Plan which is currently being developed by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD).

A second additional strategy was to allow flexibility in addressing special issues possibly on a bilateral basis. It was found during the course of this project that this strategy was unnecessary as all issues that arose have been adequately addressed under other strategies.

This report then focuses on the recommendations for the four strategies.



Study Area for West Valley Hillsides Joint Planning Review

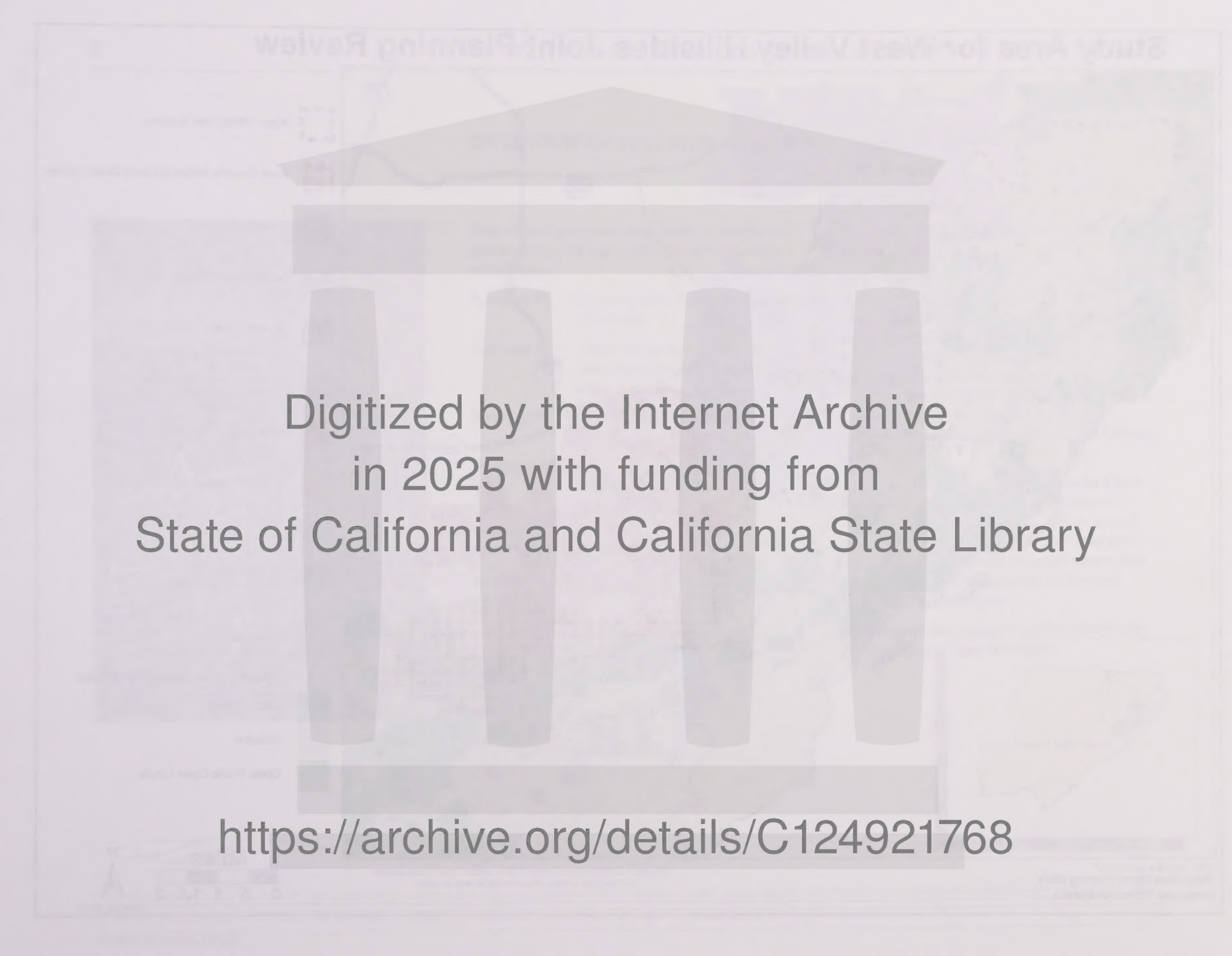


This map is a product of
Santa Clara County Planning Office
Geographic Information Systems

This map is a digital representation of data collected from various sources.
The County assumes no responsibility for data accuracy.

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STRATEGY #1: DEVELOP JOINT HILLSIDE LAND USE OBJECTIVES**Purpose**

General Plan policies provide basic direction for land use and development decisions. This strategy is intended to assure basic consistency of hillside land use policies among the various jurisdictions participating in this study.

Background

This is a unique cooperative planning project involving four cities and the County working together to achieve the shared goal of preserving the natural beauty of the West Valley hillsides – a goal which is expressed in the general plans of all the participating jurisdictions.

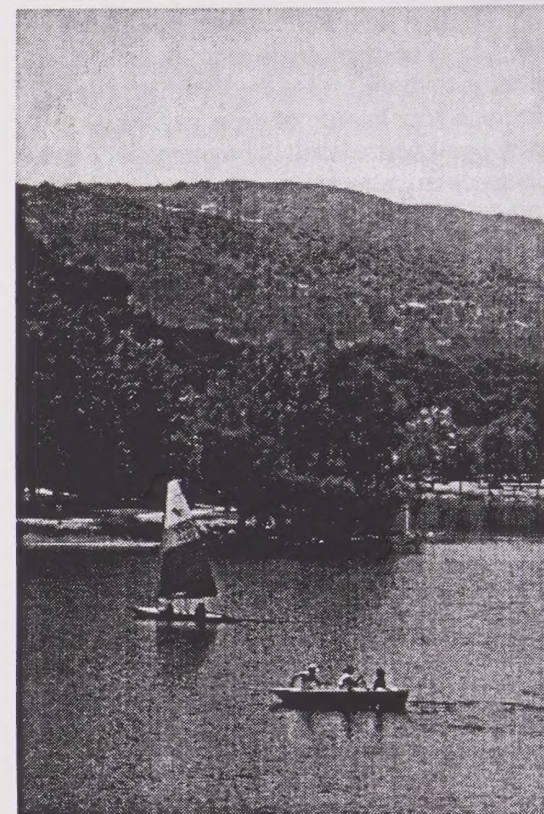
To emphasize this basic goal, a core set of joint land use policies have been developed, which echo the spirit of the Hillside Preservation Strategy. These policies are not intended to replace existing policies, but rather to help reinforce them.

Action Recommendations

Action 1. Adopt the Joint Planning and Land Use Principles for West Valley Hillsides Area as amendments to the General Plans of the participating jurisdictions to reinforce existing policies.

(These Joint Planning and Land Use Principles are listed in Appendix A.)

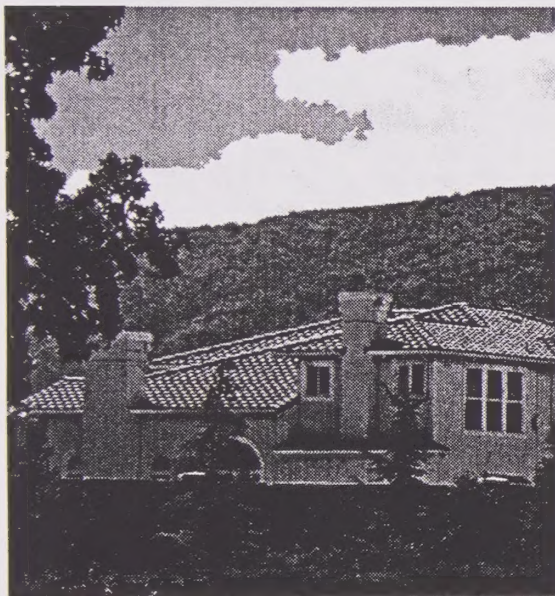
Implementors: The West Valley cities and the County



STRATEGY #2: LIMIT EXPANSION OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT INTO HILLSIDE AREAS

Purpose

Urban development, if allowed to expand further into the hillsides could drastically alter the scenic beauty of these predominantly open space lands. The purpose of this strategy is to protect the natural appearance of the West Valley hillsides by preventing expansion of urban development into hillside areas.



Background

Each of the West Valley cities currently has an established urban service area (USA) boundary which includes lands to which urban services will be provided in the short term and outside of which the County will not allow urban type development.

To build on this concept and to assure stability and integrity to this existing growth management mechanism, the cities should also adopt long term growth boundaries. Long term growth boundaries would indicate lands the cities are willing to provide with services in the next 20-30 years.

If long term growth boundaries are coterminous with or closely approximate existing urban service area boundaries, they would help prevent encroachment of urban development into the hills and make a strong statement about their desire to see the natural beauty of the hillsides maintained.

Action Recommendations:

Action 1. Delineate and adopt long term growth boundaries as amendments to city and town general plans.

Implementors: The West Valley cities

Action 2. Adopt general plan policies regarding the intent and maintenance of long term growth boundaries.*

Implementors: The West Valley cities

Action 3. Adopt policies related to the allowable land uses outside the long term growth boundary and in lands within the long term growth boundary that are outside the urban service area.*

Implementor: The County

*(Suggested policies concerning long term growth boundaries are described in Appendix B.)

Action 4. Define and limit the allowable intensity of uses which involve overnight accommodations, including golf courses, lodges, retreats and hostels; local-serving industrial/commercial uses; institutional and other non-residential uses.

Implementor: The County

STRATEGY #3: MINIMIZE THE VISUAL IMPACTS OF FUTURE HILLSIDE DEVELOPMENT

Purpose

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that future development allowed in the hillsides blends into the landscape and does not cause significant visual impacts when viewed from the valley floor.

Background

Even if the West Valley cities adopt long term growth boundaries that exclude urban development from the hillsides, low density development is still likely to occur on private lands within this area. Individual buildings, if they are not designed and located with sensitivity to the natural landscape, can detract from the scenic beauty of the hillsides.

The visual impacts of hillside development can be minimized through the proper use of design elements such as building form, color, and landscaping and through appropriate development standards governing the maximum size or height of buildings.

Each of the West Valley cities and the County have development regulations and standards as well as design review procedures intended to minimize the visual impacts of hillside development.

The County is currently reviewing its hillside design review guidelines and standards, with the multiple goals of making them:

- More effective in minimizing the visual impacts of hillside development,
- More consistent with those of the cities,
- Easier for hillside landowners and architects to understand, and
- Easier for staff to administer.

Action Recommendations:

Action 1. Require design review for development proposed on portions of the hillsides that are visible from the valley floor within the West Valley cities.

Implementor: The County

Action 2. Revise existing or adopt new development standards in areas visible from the valley floor within the West Valley cities.

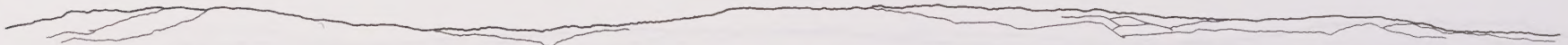
Implementor: The County

Action 3. Revise the existing design guidelines applicable to areas where design review is required

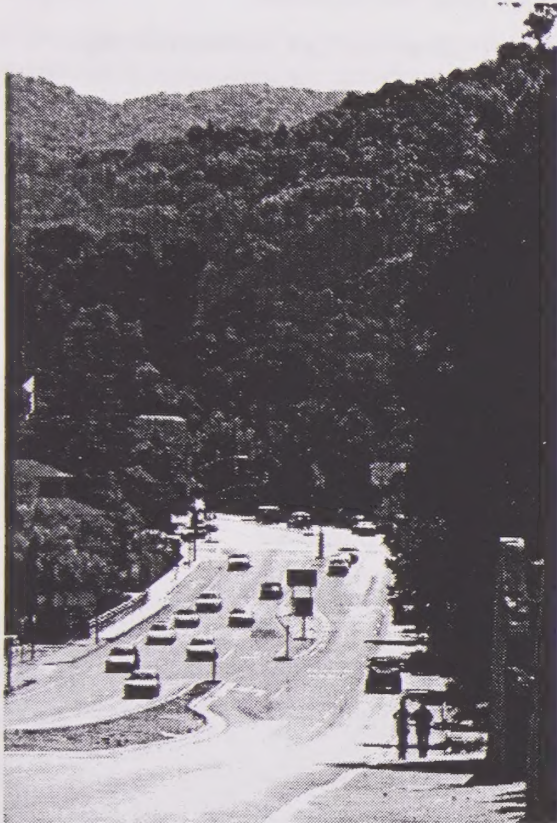
Implementor: The County

Action 4. Review city hillside development policies and standards for their effectiveness in minimizing visual impacts of development.

Implementors: The West Valley cities



STRATEGY #4: PROVIDE MECHANISMS FOR RESOLUTION OF HILLSIDE LAND USE ISSUES



Purpose

The purpose of this strategy is to provide a means for constructive resolution of inter-jurisdictional hillside land use issues that may arise.

Background

Although city and County hillside land use policies and development standards are relatively consistent, there will always exist the potential for differences of opinion regarding the approval of or standards applied to certain types of development. It is important that there be effective mechanisms for discussing and resolving such issues when they arise.

One tool for resolving such conflicts early in the development approval process is a timely interjurisdictional referral and comment procedure for projects proposed in the hillsides. The referral and comment

procedure should be used to emphasize open communication and foster good working relationships between city and County decision makers and staff.

Generally, such processes can occur at a staff level via written communications and phone conversations. On occasion, however, it may also be desirable to have face-to-face meetings between city and County officials to address issues of major significance, should they arise.

Action Recommendations:

Action 1. Review referral and comment procedures for development projects proposed within the West Valley hillsides to determine their adequacy and develop enhanced procedures where necessary.

Implementors: The West Valley cities and the County

APPENDIX A: JOINT PLANNING AND LAND USE PRINCIPLES**Protection of the West Valley Hillside Viewshed**

1. The natural beauty of the West Valley hillsides area should be maintained for its contribution to the overall quality of life of current and future generations.

Minimizing the Visual Impacts of Hillside Development

2. *New development in the West Valley hillsides area should be located and designed to minimize its visibility from the valley floor.*

Allowable Land Uses

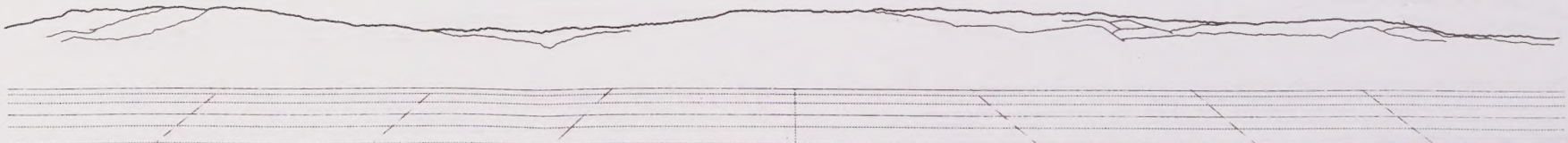
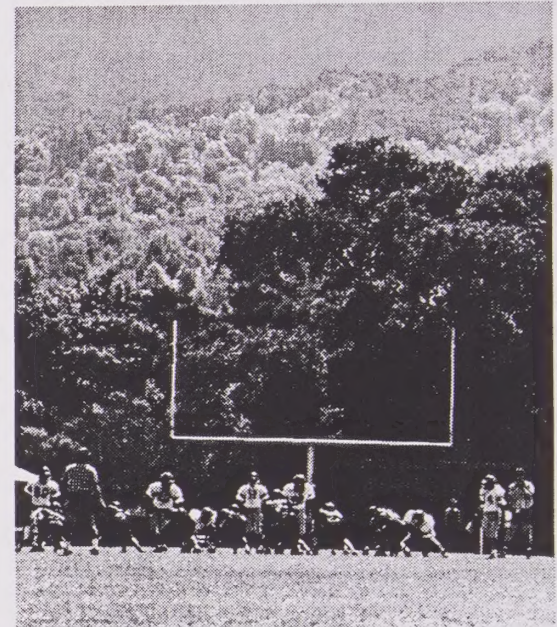
3. New land uses within the West Valley Hillside area should be limited to non-urban uses that are compatible with the preservation of the natural appearance of the hillsides.

Limiting the Extension of Urban Services and Urban Development

4. Urban development and the extension of urban services should be limited to those areas most suitable for urban development. Further substantial expansion of the urban area into the West Valley hillsides should be discouraged.

Interjurisdictional Cooperation

5. The West Valley cities and the County should work cooperatively to maintain the natural appearance of the West Valley hillsides and should establish procedures for resolving interjurisdictional land use issues that may arise in this area.



APPENDIX B: LONG TERM GROWTH BOUNDARY POLICIES

Background

Existing urban service area boundaries primarily serve as short term growth management boundaries, indicating lands to which urban services will be provided in the short term (generally within approximately 5 years).

Long term growth boundaries are intended to indicate lands to which the city/town expects to provide with urban services within approximately 20-30 years.

Long term growth boundaries help to:

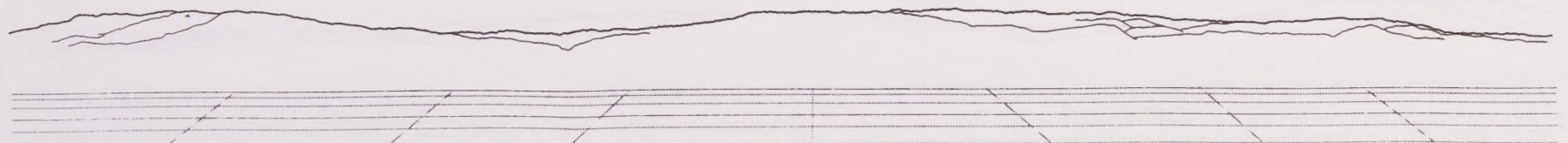
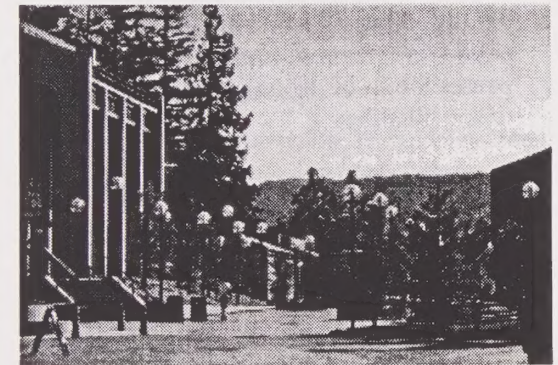
- a. Reinforce fundamental policies concerning the appropriate location of urban development.
- b. Preserve the predominantly natural character and natural resources of hillsides by preventing urban development from encroaching into them.
- c. Protect public health and safety by preventing urban development in hazardous areas.

Policies Suggested for Adoption by the West Valley Cities in Their General Plans

1. The City/Town will delineate and adopt a long term growth boundary indicating the lands to which it is willing to provide urban services within approximately the next 20-30 years.
2. The City's/Town's long term growth boundary will only be modified in conjunction with a comprehensive review of the City's General Plan.
3. The City's/Town's urban service area boundary will not be expanded outside its long term growth boundary.
4. Proposed revisions to the City's / Town's long term growth boundaries will be referred to the County for review and comment.

Policies Suggested for Adoption by the County in Its General Plan

1. The West Valley cities should delineate and adopt long term growth boundaries indicating the lands to which they are willing to provide urban services within approximately the next 20-30 years.
2. The County will maintain current land use designations and prohibit uses of an urban density, intensity or nature outside the long term growth boundaries and in lands within the long term growth boundaries that are outside the urban service area.





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